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“I Don’t Get It. I Need Help”: Emergent Bilinguals Seeking and Receiving Help From Peers in Language Arts

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“I don’t get it. I need help”

**“I don’t get it. I need help”:
Emergent bilinguals seeking and receiving help from peers in language arts**

Abstract

This study examines how emergent bilinguals seek help in language arts and how peers respond to their requests for help. Using six months of naturally occurring student talk in a United States Fourth-Grade classroom, this article shows that (1) emergent bilinguals more frequently use general requests than specific requests to obtain help, (2) only 41% of emergent bilingual requests for help succeeded in eliciting helpful peer responses, and (3) there is no significant difference between specific and general requests for help and help received. Findings suggest the need for policies and practices that foster the educational environments necessary for peer collaboration that promotes academic understanding.

Introduction

Earlier this year, teachers across the country challenged United States Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos' statements that schools were still living in the Industrial Era with students sitting in rows facing the blackboard (Lombardo, 2018; Will, 2018). Classrooms today, teachers argued, have students working collaboratively in table groups, on the floor and huddled in front of interactive smart boards (Lombardo, 2018; Will, 2018). While teachers maintain that group work is common practice in American classrooms (Lombardo, 2018; Will, 2018), researchers have argued that not enough class time is reserved for students to work together and talk through ideas (Cohen & Lotan, 2014). And, simply providing opportunities for small group work is not sufficient to increase student academic achievement or English language development (Cohen & Lotan, 2014; Webb, Ing, Kersting, & Nemer, 2013). English language learner research suggests that structured opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction are probably more likely to promote English language development than unstructured opportunities in which students of different language proficiency levels are simply grouped together in the seating arrangement (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, & Christian, 2006; Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010; Saunders & Goldenberg, 2010).

Research on effective teaching practices has revealed that cooperative group work can be beneficial to student academic achievement (Klingner & Vaughn, 2000; Klingner, Vaughn, & Schumm, 1998; Webb et al., 2013). Initial studies on the benefits of cooperative learning, however, resulted in mixed findings (Webb, 1982; Webb et al., 2013). The cooperative learning research community first explained the inconsistent findings as resulting from research design issues, subject matter differences and inappropriate measures (Webb, 1982). Currently, the cooperative learning field generally acknowledges that simply grouping students and requesting

that they work together does not guarantee that students will learn or know how to work cooperatively (Cohen & Lotan, 2014; Gillies, 2004; Klingner & Vaughn, 2000; Webb et al., 2013; Webb & Palincsar, 1996). Rather, students may need additional supports and direction to guide their joint work (Cohen & Lotan, 2014; Saunders & Goldenberg, 2010). Clearly, *how* students interact while engaging in collaborative work is important. In this study, I explore how eight Grade Four emergent bilinguals¹ (EB) seek help from peers and whether their help-seeking requests are successful.

Language as Action

This study is grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory and the understanding that language is a dynamic meaning making process that occurs in interaction. The terms *linguaging* and *language as action* have become well-known and widely used terms to reflect the understanding of language "as something we do rather than a system we draw on, as a material part of social and cultural life rather than an abstract entity" (Pennycook, 2010, p. 2). Rather than viewing language as static and easily captured by "correct" grammatical forms, language-as-action views language as a dynamic meaning-making process (van Lier & Walqui, 2012). Humans act through language; how we use language changes depending on the context. From this perspective, correctness is socially determined and language is inextricably linked to the language situation.

By adopting a language-as-action view of language, I acknowledge that emergent bilinguals work through ideas, seek help, and are able to participate in academic discussions using their developing language. Because I view language as action, I include children's help-

¹ I use the term emergent bilingual (Garcia, 2009) in place of linguistically diverse or English learner to highlight the students' developing bilingualism.

seeking requests that use English often considered “incorrect” in the analyses. I use this frame to address aspects of emergent bilingual language use that often go unnoticed.

Help seeking among emergent bilingual students

Analogous to the cooperative learning literature, research that focuses on emergent bilingual interactions with non-emergent bilinguals acknowledges the potential benefits of promoting student interactions, but cautions against expecting that group work will suffice to improve emergent bilingual English language development (Genesee et al., 2006; Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010). In their review of the literature on English language development instruction, Saunders and Goldenberg (2010) find relatively strong evidence in support of interactive activities that are carefully planned and carried out, highlighting the importance of support in collaborative work. A review of the research by the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE) also reports on a study that found that monolingual English speakers are typically more interested in completing tasks than in assisting their emergent bilingual peers (Genesee et al., 2006). Therefore, in order for interactive activities to yield language-learning opportunities for emergent bilinguals, Saunders and Goldenberg (2010) recommend that careful consideration be given to the training of more proficient English-speaking peers.

When students struggle, they often rely on their teacher or peers for help in explaining and clarifying information. Nevertheless, not every request for help results in actual help. Not receiving help and not receiving the “right” kind of help has a strong negative relationship with achievement (Webb, 1982). Webb (1982) states “...although students’ responses to teammates’ questions may not always alleviate confusion, receiving no help when needed seems to be detrimental to achievement,” (p. 425). Finding a strong negative relationship between two variables, however, does not provide enough information to make a causal statement. In other

words, a strong negative relationship does not explain whether *not* receiving help is detrimental to achievement or if students with low academic achievement are less successful in receiving help from peers. Nevertheless, regardless of the direction of the relationship, research has found a strong negative relationship between not receiving help and academic achievement.

Emergent bilinguals have struggled to meet school's academic expectations and may benefit from the support of teachers and peers. Yet, help from peers might be difficult to obtain. A study reported in the National Literacy Panel's review of the literature on second-language learners and literacy development found that Spanish-speaking students working in cooperative groups were less effective in receiving help than monolingual English-speaking students (August & Shanahan, 2006). Spanish-speaking students, the authors explain, addressed their requests to specific students far less frequently than monolingual English-speakers (August & Shanahan, 2006). Not directing their requests for help to specific students may have contributed to fewer instances of received help.

Furthermore, merely receiving the correct answer without elaboration or details has been found *not* to help students understand or to correct misunderstandings (Webb, 1982; Webb, 1991). In other words, receiving help is most beneficial when the help received is elaborated as opposed to simply receiving the correct answer. Peer-elaborated help, rather than teacher help, may be particularly useful because students are more likely to understand each other's misunderstandings and be able to explain concepts in a way that other students understand (Webb, 1989; Webb & Farivar, 1994).

Research suggests that asking clear and specific questions is likely to result in elaborated help (Wilkinson, 1985; Wilkinson & Spinelli, 1983). A study of 184 Grade Seven math students found that students who asked general questions were less likely to receive elaborated help than

students who posed specific questions (Webb et al., 2013). General questions were also more likely to result in no responses from peers than specific questions (Webb et al., 2013). Given the increased expectations and opportunities for peer interaction in the CCSS, the increased probability that emergent bilinguals will require more help and the strong negative relationship between not receiving help and achievement, it is important to take a closer look at how emergent bilinguals seek help in language arts and how peers respond to their requests for help.

By examining naturally occurring Grade Four emergent bilingual talk over the course of six months, I address the following research questions:

1. How do young emergent bilinguals seek help from peers during English language arts?
2. How do peers respond to emergent bilinguals' help-seeking requests?
3. Are there differences in peer response elicited by general and specific requests? If so, what are they?

Methods

The School and Classroom

The data presented in this article are from six months at Sage Elementary in California, a western state in the United States. At the time of this study, Sage's students were 67% Latino, 25% Asian, 2% Filipino, 2% African American and 2% White. Slightly more than half of Sage's students were designated as *English Language Learners* and 76% of the students were eligible for free or reduced-priced meals. Ms. Nielson's Grade Four classroom was recommended by the school principal as a space rich with opportunities for student talk. Nineteen of 32 students in Ms. Nielson's classroom were identified as *English Language Learners* and only four of the students were identified as "English Only"; Nearly all of the students in Ms. Nielson's classroom spoke a language other than English.

Six of the eight focal students' language arts instruction took place in Ms. Nielson's classroom and two students (Alexandra and Silver) walked to Ms. Yang's reading class for language arts. Ms. Nielson used the language arts curriculum *Reading Street* and Ms. Yang used *Inside*, an intensive reading intervention curriculum. Both teachers communicated to students that they should help each other with their work because the teachers could not help all students at once. They often reminded students to "ask three before me" if they needed help and the teacher was unavailable. During my observations, students helped each other as they engaged in a range of collaborative and independent academic tasks. Students, for example, sought help as they completed worksheets and vocabulary tasks independently, engaged in independent and collaborative writing tasks and answered reading comprehension questions in groups and in pairs.

The Children

Eight Fourth-Grade emergent bilinguals were chosen to participate in this study. The criteria for selecting participants included: (1) that they be classified as English learners, (2) that they spoke Spanish and (3) that they met the "struggling" or "successful" criteria described below. With the help of the classroom teacher, I identified four "successful" and four "struggling" students. "Struggling" students were identified by the following criteria: a score of Below Basic or Far Below Basic on the state English language arts and a score of below average in classroom ELA assessments. "Successful" students were identified as follows: a score of Basic or Proficient on the state English language arts and a score of average or above average in classroom ELA assessments. Selecting focal students in this way helped me capture the English language use of these two distinct groups of students. Table 1 provides a summary of the focal students' performance on the state's language arts assessment.

(Insert Table 1)

Data Sources

I observed and audio recorded the children twice a week for a period of six months. I drafted a recording schedule that permitted three students to each wear an audio recorder on the days of my visits, resulting in approximately three hours of recording a day (10:15am - 2:15pm, excluding lunch). The children placed a small recorder in their pockets and wore a clip-on microphone connected to the recorder. The microphone captured both the focal students' and interlocutors' talk. Having the focal students wear the recording device enabled me to capture their language use as they moved about the classroom and interacted with various class participants. While students were initially highly conscious of being recorded at the beginning of the project, they soon grew accustomed to wearing the recorder and often forgot that they were wearing it. I transcribed the classroom talk using Conversational Analysis conventions (Hutchby & Woofit, 2008).

Each observation day, I focused my field notes on the three EBs with the audio recorders. My field notes alternated between focal students every 30 minutes or so and provided non-verbal information that helped contextualize EB speech production. To better understand EB language use, I conducted three interviews and had frequent informal conversations with the focal students and classroom teacher.

Data Analyses

Findings from this study relied on the initial identification of requests from a larger study (Author, 2018). I used conversation analysis (Hutchby & Woofit, 2008) to identify all of the academic speech acts, or acts performed by the speaker as a result of their speech (Crystal, 2009), the focal children produced during language arts. By *academic* speech acts I mean speech

acts produced as the students engaged in academic tasks. See Appendix A for conversation analysis transcription conventions. Requests made up 16 of the 57 types of academic speech acts the children produced. Of the 16 request speech acts, my analysis for this article focused on the following help-seeking requests: requests for assistance, requests for clarification, content requests for information, procedure requests for information, spelling requests for information and *what's the answer* requests for information. Given my interest in how emergent bilinguals seek and receive help from peers instead of the teacher, I limited my analysis to instances of help sought and received –or not—from peers only.

I then reviewed all the peer-to-peer exchanges within the requests for assistance, content requests for information, procedure requests for information and *what's the answer* requests for information speech acts in order to identify instances where emergent bilinguals sought help. I used this method because not all content and procedure requests for information speech acts were actual requests for help. Some content requests for information were communicative exchanges in which the focal student was simply asking a content question that was necessary to complete the task as opposed to a true request for help. For example, a student asking a peer, “Why do you give me a three?” because they need to complete a peer feedback form is not a true request for help. “Why do you give me a three?” is a request for information, but not a request for help. For the purposes of this article, I define seeking help as attempts to gain the information necessary to move past confusion or lack of understanding content. This information is necessary to complete the academic task at hand.

Having identified the help-seeking requests in emergent bilingual-peer interactions, I followed the coding conventions in the Webb et al. (2013) study of Grade Seven math students' help-seeking behavior. I coded requests for help as general or specific requests for help. General

requests for help included, “What is that word?” and general statements of confusion such as “I don’t get it.” Specific requests for help avoided general terms such as “that,” “it” and “this” and, instead included more specific terms. For example, “Do you have ideas for a synonym for lizard?” was coded as a specific request for help. See Table 2 for requests for help codes.

(Insert Table 2)

Finally, adapting the coding conventions of Webb et al. (2013), I coded peer responses as *no response*, *non-content response*, *answer to all or part of the question*, or *elaborated response*. The Webb et al. (2013) coding of student-to-student verbal interactions included two levels that captured what I refer to as *elaborated responses*. These levels were “numerical procedure or series of calculations without verbal labeling of any quantity” and what they identified as the highest level of help, “explanation that includes verbal labeling of at least one quantity” (2013). The two levels were very math specific (since the instructional context in the Webb study was mathematics). Because this study was investigating language arts, the coding scheme required adaptation. I could find no clear distinction between the two levels in language arts, so I combined what Webb and colleagues had described as two different response types into one elaborated response. I also added a *refuse to help* code to capture peer responses that refused the emergent bilinguals’ help seeking attempts. See Table 3 for a list of codes for peer responses to help requests. I then used a chi-square analysis to determine whether there was any association between type of requests and peer responses (Welkowitz, Cohen, & Ewen, 2006).

(Insert Table 3)

Peer silence or ignoring the help-seeking request was coded as *no response*. *Non-content responses* included all peer responses that did not provide an answer or an elaborated response. These were typically requests for clarification or peers communicating that they did not know the

answer, but also included instances of a peer attempting to barter an answer for a toy figurine. *Answers to all or part of the question* were answers with no elaboration. For example, in response to “What’s this?” (general request for help), a peer says “a comma.” *Elaborated responses* were answers to the help request that provided additional information or details. For example, in response to “Does the lizard could go underwater?” a peer says “Yeah, that is. It’s like a crocodile or whatever.” Peer responses were not analyzed for accuracy or whether the help seeker appeared to understand the peer response.

Findings

In this study, I set out to investigate how Fourth-Grade emergent bilinguals sought help from peers as well as how their peers responded to their requests. Over the course of six months, the students in this study produced 384 requests for information from their peers during language arts. Of the 384 requests in the database, 110 were help-seeking requests. Emergent bilinguals identified as “struggling” sought help from peers more frequently than “successful” emergent bilinguals. For instance, emergent bilinguals considered to be “successful” in language arts produced help-seeking requests approximately once per hour (1.16), whereas “struggling” emergent bilinguals sought help from peers almost three times per hour (2.71). While it may not be surprising that struggling students would need more help than successful students, it is important to note that the children identified as struggling actively sought help from their peers. Since two of the struggling students received language arts instruction from a different teacher, these differences may reflect differences between how Ms. Nielson and Ms. Yang organized small group work and provided opportunities for peer-to-peer help.

How do emergent bilinguals seek help from peers during language arts?

As a whole, the emergent bilinguals in this study used more general requests (78) than specific requests (32) when seeking help from peers. When exploring how “struggling” and “successful” emergent bilinguals sought help from peers, however, I found that “successful” EBs posed specific requests 42% of the time, whereas “struggling” EBs posed specific requests only 24% of the time.

General requests for help

While all general requests lacked specific information about the help that the requester needed, there was a distinct variation in how the general requests were made. Within the general requests for help, nearly half began with “What?” (36 out of 78). For example, “What do I do?” “What’s number nine?” “What is that?” and “What’s that word?” The second most frequently occurring general requests for help were indirect requests (12 out of 78), such as “I need help,” “I already looked; it’s not there” and “I don’t know what to do.” Explicit requests were the third most frequently occurring way (7 occurrences) that emergent bilinguals sought help from peers. Explicit requests included “Could you help me, Alina?” and “Can you help us?” When the requester sought help from peers, commands and requests for help beginning with “Where?” were each produced five times. Commands included “Help me” and requests for help beginning with “Where” included “Where do we put this?” There was no discernable pattern in the remaining 25 help-seeking requests.

Specific requests for help

The focal students in this study made specific requests for help 32 times; these were instances in which requesters provided details about what they needed help with. Most specific requests for help were spelling requests in which emergent bilinguals posed questions such as “How do you spell *national*?” and “How do you spell *beautiful*?” Whereas some specific

requests for help were short and direct, others were longer. For example, a student asked, “What are these called, the ones at the top? They’re like commas, but these things at the top. What are they called? I forgot” in an attempt to describe apostrophes.

In summary, when seeking help from peers, the children in this study made general requests for help almost 75% of the time. Emergent bilinguals who were identified as successful in language arts were more likely to produce specific requests when seeking help than were emergent bilinguals identified as struggling. General requests did not provide much information about the children’s areas of confusion and tended to take the form of “What is that?” and “What do I do?” whereas specific requests gave more information about the help-seekers’ area of need. In the section that follows, I present findings on how peers responded to emergent bilinguals’ help-seeking requests.

How do peers respond to emergent bilinguals’ help-seeking requests?

Peers responded to emergent bilinguals’ help-seeking requests in the following ways: providing no response, refusing to help, providing a non-content response, answering part or all of the question and providing an elaborated response with more information than simply an answer to the question. Out of the 110 attempts to seek help from peers during language arts, fewer than half (41%) of the attempts were successful in eliciting a helpful peer response. I identify *answers* and *elaborated responses* as helpful peer responses. Figure 1 provides an overview of peer responses to emergent bilingual requests for help.

(insert Figure 1)

As Figure 1 illustrates, 36% of the help-seeking requests resulted in an answer to all or part of the question; only 5% resulted in an elaborated peer response. The remaining 59% of the

requests for help were met with no response, a refusal to help, or a non-content response that did not provide the answer the requester sought.

No response

Approximately one out of every four (25%) of emergent bilingual requests was met with no audible response, or silence. In the excerpt below, Alexandra attempts to seek help from Alina, a student sitting next to her in class. The whole class is working on a writing assignment, but Alexandra and a few other students have been given a different writing assignment than the rest of the class. Alexandra is writing about a trip to the beach, whereas the rest of the class is writing a compare-and-contrast essay. Ms. Nielson, the classroom teacher, has just asked Alexandra to work on combining her short sentences into compound sentences. Less than a minute after Ms. Nielson walks away, Alexandra explicitly seeks help from Alina, who has been talking with Tommy while they work.

(1) *Alexandra* Could you help me Alina? It's like-

Alina -The one I talked to you about. [The one who picked me up.]

Tommy [Oh Daniel?]

Alina Yeah.

Without responding or otherwise acknowledging Alexandra's request for help, Alina interrupts the request for help to continue her conversation with Tommy. Alexandra, however, tries to seek help again (see next excerpt below).

Refuse to help

In 2% of the requests for help, peers responded by refusing to help. All peer refusals to help occurred in response to general requests made by struggling students. The excerpt below

immediately follows Alexandra's first attempt to seek help from Alina. After receiving no response from Alina, Alexandra tries again.

(2) *Alexandra* Could you help me Alina?

Alina Mine is du:e.

Alexandra ° Today. Mine is too. °

Alina ° No it isn't. °

Alexandra ° Yeah it is °

Tommy °Hurry u:p you're so slo:w!°

Alina °I'm sorry! °

This time Alina responds. Her response of "mine is due" is an indirect way to tell Alexandra that she will not help. Alexandra does not relent on her help-seeking request, however, and tells Alina that her essay has the same deadline. In the end, Alexandra is unsuccessful in receiving help from Alina.

Non-content response

Non-content responses comprised 31% of the peer responses. Non-content responses were responses in which the children communicated that they did not know the answer or how to help, sought clarification about the help needed or attempted to negotiate a trade for the answer. In one communicative exchange, the peer responded by mocking the requester's question. The excerpt below is an example of a peer response that communicates that they do not know how to help.

(3) *Alexandra* °The volca:no:- °

-The volca:no: ughh.

How do you spe:ll eru:pts?

Student °Eru:pts?°

°Hmm. I didn't really spell it or put erupts in this. Hmm. °

The following excerpt demonstrates a peer attempting to trade an answer for an item inside Dominic's desk.

(4) *Dominic* Okay. A reference in a sentence! Hey! Can you give me can you give me like an example?

Student If you give me this look.

Dominic For reference?

Student Look if you give me this look. Open your desk.

The following excerpt shows a student first attempting to seek clarification about the word Alexandra needs help spelling. When Alexandra clarifies that she needs help spelling *singed*, the student responds by mocking Alexandra's use of *singed* instead of *sang*.

(5) *Alexandra* °°Sing°°

How do you spell singed?

S-i-n-d?

Sa:w?

Student You have to do (inaudible)

No it's we: sa:w?

Yeah we saw not we: see:

Alexandra No I said we si:nged! How do you spell si:nged?

Student £ You said si:nged hahaha £

Non-content responses did not result in a useful or appropriate answer to the peer request for help.

Answer to all or part of the question

In fact, 36% of emergent bilingual requests for help elicited an answer to all or part of the question. Some answers occurred immediately following a help-seeking request, whereas others required clarification before ending at an answer. The excerpt below shows Silver--a struggling student--producing a general help request, "I don't get it; I need help" while completing a worksheet. Silver's peer first provides a non-content response in which he seeks more information about the worksheet problem that is causing Silver trouble.

- (6) *Silver* ° Number seven i:s °
 ° Tight °
 ° I don't get it I need help °
- Student* ° What number are you on °

Silver says he needs help with number seven, and his peer responds by providing the answer - the word *dries*.

- (7) *Silver* ° Number seven °
- Student* ° Number seven is dries °
 ° d-r-i-e-s °
- Silver* ° d-r-i-e-s °

Peer responses in which they provided the answer to all or part of the question also included instances in which the answer was longer than one word in length, but remained a simple telling of the "correct" answer. Telling the answer is different from elaborated responses

(which also contain the answer) because telling the answer includes no attempt to explain or further advance the seeker's understanding.

In the following excerpt, Josey and two peers worked together to identify the main idea in the reading selection. Ms. Nielson had instructed the students to read the selection, identify the main idea individually and then discuss it to agree on one sentence that communicates the main idea. Dominic invites Josey to share what she has identified as the reading selection's main idea. Josey shares her main idea, begins again and is interrupted as Missy begins sharing her own main idea.

- (8) *Dominic* Josey you may proceed!
- Josey* ° Thank [you! °
- Ms. Nielson* [It's so much easier if you work together like that
- Josey* Okay. Glacier Point is the highest-
- point
- Dominic* O:kay
- Josey* Glacier-
- Missy* -The scenery in Glacier point is very beautiful [and ((mumbling))]
- Josey* [Point.]
- Glacier Point i:s what?
- What's Glacier Point?
- Glacier point is-
- Gu:ys! ((whining voice))
- Why aren't you-
- Missy* -It's a very beautiful sight!

Just (write) this Josey. The scenery in Glacier point is very beautiful. It's a very beautiful place.

Josey does not hear all of Missy's main idea, so she asks "Glacier Point is what? What's Glacier Point?" When she receives no response, she begins to complain. Missy responds and answers Josey by repeating her main idea. Missy's response answers Josey's help-seeking request and suggests that she just wants Josey to write down the main idea and move on. In other words, she does not wish to spend any more time helping Josey with the main idea.

Elaborated response

Elaborated responses represented 5% of emergent bilingual requests for help. Elaborated responses were answers that provided additional information or details beyond simply supplying the answer. In the excerpt below, Silver, a student identified as struggling, seeks help in figuring out what *details* are. His initial question "What is details?" is a general question, but he immediately follows the general question with a request for more information. The addition of more information to his question makes Silver's request for help a specific request. Silver's specific request for help suggests that he is attempting to work through his lack of understanding of the word *details* rather than simply posing a general question and waiting for an answer.

(9)	<i>Silver</i>	Oka:y
		Details
		What is details?
		Like details like tell something like
		Like like what happened in the story?
	<i>Student</i>	Details like mo:re
		Like (inaudible)

Like mo-

What's happening in the story

Like exciting things

Silver

O:h tha:t

Tha:t

I ride my bike to a haunted house with my-

Silver's specific request for help is met with an elaborated peer response. According to Silver's peer, details are exciting features of the story and information about what is happening in the story. Silver accepted the elaborated response and continued writing his story.

In summary, less than half (41%) of emergent bilinguals' requests for help were successful in eliciting a helpful peer response. One out of every four help-seeking requests received no peer response, and only 5% of the requests were met with an elaborated response that provided more than simply the correct answer. Most peer responses to emergent bilingual requests for help (36%) were answers to all or part of the question. In the section that follows, I analyze peer responses by general and specific requests for help.

Are there differences in peer responses elicited by general and specific requests? If so, what are they?

In contrast to the Webb et al. findings (2013), peer responses by general and specific requests reveal that there is no significant difference in how peers respond according to the type of request for help posed. While there appear to be slight descriptive differences in peer responses to general and specific requests (see Figure 2), the differences are too small to draw any definitive conclusions.

(insert Figure 2)

Figure 2 illustrates that 45% of emergent bilinguals' specific requests for help were successful in eliciting a helpful peer response, and 40% of the general requests were also successful. Peers provided elaborated responses for 13% of the specific requests, but only for 3% of the general requests for help. General requests elicited a slightly higher number of no responses and answers (27% and 37%, respectively) than did specific requests (23% and 32%, respectively), but these differences are not significantly different from what one would expect. The chi-square test ($\chi^2=0.24$, $df=4$) was not significant. These findings suggest that when emergent bilinguals seek help from peers, specific requests may be no more effective than general requests at eliciting helpful peer responses.

This study had several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. It is important to note that the data from this study did not allow the coding of peer responses for accuracy. While I was able to gauge the accuracy of some peer responses (e.g., spelling), I was unable to assess accuracy when the help request and response referred to worksheets or classroom material that I did not collect. It is very possible that some peer responses were inaccurate. Inaccuracy in responses could impede rather than support emergent bilingual understanding of the concepts. As a result, future research on seeking help and help received from peers should consider the accuracy of peer responses as well as the fact that a response was given.

Discussion and Implications

By investigating how emergent bilinguals seek assistance from peers during language arts, I found that EBs more frequently use general requests than specific requests to obtain help. The students in this study posed general requests in various forms, including using "what" to

begin their query, indirect requests and commands for help. When their request for help received no response, emergent bilinguals sometimes persisted and asked again. Overall, however, only 41% of emergent bilingual requests for help succeeded in eliciting helpful peer responses.

Findings from this study suggest that peers may have been more interested in finishing their assignment than in helping their emergent bilingual peers. The highest responses to both general and specific requests for help were answers to part or all of the question. The small group exchange showing Josey seeking help from Missy (excerpt eight) is similar to the finding reported in a review of the research suggesting that native speakers of English are more interested in completing tasks themselves than in helping their emergent bilingual peers (Genesee et al., 2006). The review of the research describes a native English speaker as saying “just write that down. Who cares? Let’s finish up” (Genesee et al., 2006). Missy was not identified as an English learner, but it is unclear if school documentation identified her as a former English learner or as a native speaker of English. Classroom communication shows that she is bilingual in Spanish and English. Perhaps providing the correct answer as opposed to elaborate explanatory responses were less time consuming and allowed the students to continue their own work at a steady pace. While receiving the correct answer may enable emergent bilinguals to move to the next stage of their classwork, it will likely not help them advance their understanding or remedy misunderstandings.

While prior research has found that specific requests for help tend to result in a useful peer response (Webb et al., 2013), I found no significant relationship between specific and general requests for help and help received. In other words, more specific requests that signaled the area of need did not result in more or more useful help. Why might findings in this study be different from those found in prior research? First, prior studies on help seeking were conducted

within cooperative learning environments in the math subject area. The requests for help in this study did not occur exclusively within cooperative group settings. Rather, this study analyzed natural student talk during language arts as the children worked independently, in pairs, in groups and participated in whole-class activities and discussions. Therefore, findings on help seeking and help giving among peers may not be generalizable beyond math cooperative group settings. Future research should explore emergent bilingual help seeking and the associated help giving across the content areas and while students are engaged in independent and cooperative tasks. Second, prior research has indicated that Spanish-speaking students working in cooperative groups were less effective in receiving help than monolingual English-speaking students. It is possible that there were no differences between the help received with respect to general and specific requests for help because this study focused exclusively on emergent bilinguals seeking help.

Given these findings, how can we help young children, particularly emergent bilinguals, learn to seek help in ways that will lead to receiving useful responses? Moreover, how can we prepare young children to help their peers? Most young children know that providing the answer is generally not acceptable because giving answers is commonly viewed as cheating. The problem is not that the children think it is acceptable to give the right answer; the problem seems to be that they are either unprepared to provide elaborated help or they are more focused on completing their own work first rather than helping peers. This finding corroborates Klingner and Vaughn's (2000) conclusion that the motivation to help peers and awareness of how to assist is key in cooperative work. As a result, instead of responding to the presence of collaborative discussions in the common core standards by increasing the number of group and peer activities,

educators should consider making their classroom environments more conducive to peer-to-peer help.

Over a decade ago, Lantolf (2003) observed that educational environments inculcate students into a culture of correct answers. Students, he explained, learn overtime that educational spaces value correct answers more than experimentation with language and ideas (Lantolf, 2003). An emphasis on individual academic achievement largely based on providing correct answers on tests and in classroom discussions communicates to students that individual students producing the right answers is what truly matters in school. The emphasis on collaborative discussions set forth in the academic standards will likely result in increased opportunities for students to collaborate and help one another. Current assessment and instructional practices, however, have not yet shifted to foster the educational environments necessary for collaboration to happen. Maintaining focus on individual academic achievement works against collaboration efforts in the classroom.

Schools and teachers can begin to make instructional changes in their classrooms that communicate to students that collaboration and helping others is valued in school. Schools that aim to foster a more collaborative school environment can provide direct instruction and practice on how to seek and provide peer-to-peer help. For example, teachers across grade levels can provide instruction and practice on how to pose specific questions, how peers can ask clarifying questions to better understand the question or response and how to provide elaborated responses that aid content understanding. Given that specific requests for help in a range of language arts tasks did not result in more useful help, peer help instruction should address how to help others when working independently, collaboratively and across subject areas. Help-givers should also feel comfortable saying that they do not know how to help and help-seekers should have a

clearer idea of what to do if they are unable to obtain help from peers. To support these efforts and communicate that helping others is valued in school, schools could award special recognitions to peers that help others on academic tasks and add a helping others category to school report cards.

Conclusion

With the emphasis on collaborative discussions set forth in the academic standards and increasingly rigorous academic expectations, emergent bilinguals are likely to turn to their peers for collaboration and to seek help more than before. This study's findings show that emergent bilinguals' English proficiency is not hindering their ability to seek help. In fact, the findings in this study highlight that emergent bilinguals *are* actively seeking help from peers when they do not understand content and their requests for help were produced in perfectly understandable English. I found no evidence that peers were unable to provide help due to emergent bilinguals' English. Alexandra, who was featured in several peer-to-peer talk excerpts, scored in the lowest level possible in both English language arts and the state English language development test. Even though her English language abilities tested at the lowest level possible (Beginning), she was very capable of formulating requests for help. Not only was she able to seek help from peers, but she also persisted (in English) when peers seemed reluctant to help. In closing, emergent bilinguals are using their developing English to seek help from peers and only 41% of their attempts succeeded in eliciting helpful peer responses. Findings from this study suggest a need for policies and practices that challenge a culture of correct answers (Lantolf, 2003) and instead foster the educational environments necessary for peer collaboration that promotes emergent bilingual students' academic understanding.

Appendix A

Conversation Analysis Transcription Conventions

[Overlapping talk]	Two or more people talking at the same time
:	Stretching of a sound
°Quiet/soft voice°	Indicates quiet or soft voice, but not a whisper
°°Whisper°°	Indicates whispering
-	Indicates self-interruption or cut-off
((description of events))	Words inside double parentheses describe events
(possible hearing)	Words inside single parentheses indicate a possible hearing

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Table 1
Focal student state language arts test scores

Focal student	Language Arts
Alexandra	Far Below Basic
Silver	Far Below Basic
Jenny	Below Basic
Jack	Below Basic
Olivia	Proficient
Dominic	Proficient
Josey	Proficient
Tommy	Proficient

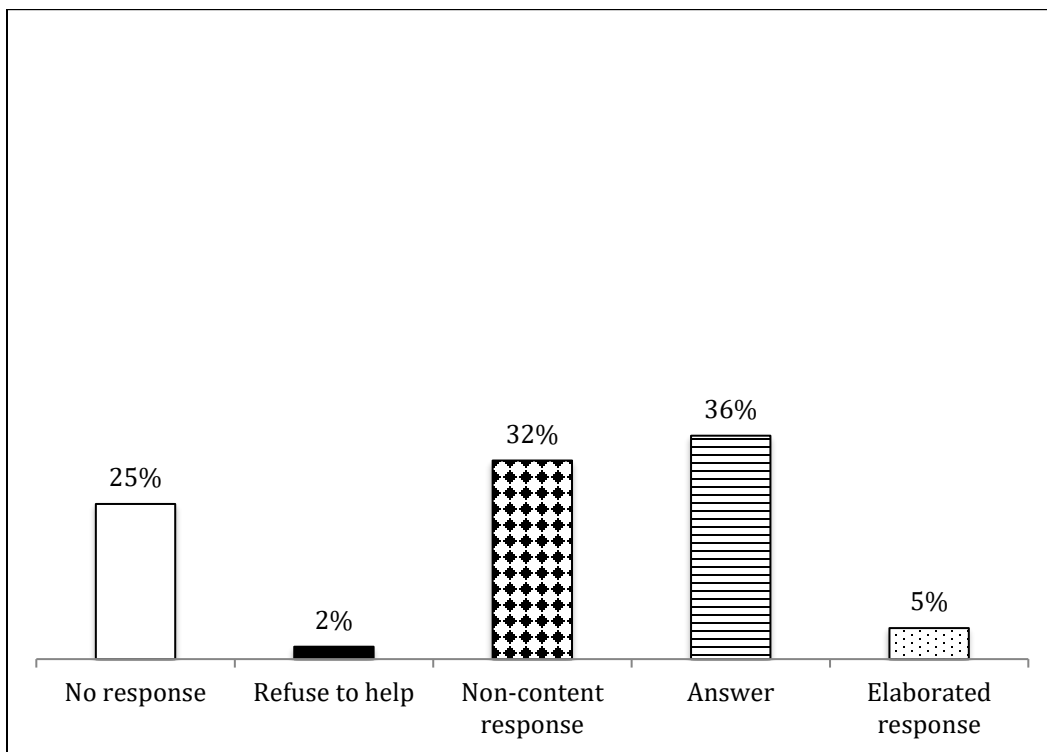
Note: State language arts test score range: Far Below Basic, Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced

Table 2
Codes for general and specific requests for help

Request for help	Definition	Examples	Commentary
General	Requests for help that do not provide information about the area of need. General requests may give the impression that the help seeker is simply seeking the answer rather than understanding	<i>What's that word?</i>	It is unclear if the student needs help with reading the word, help in understanding the meaning of the word, or both
		<i>What's number nine?</i>	The student is asking for the answer to number nine, but the area of confusion is unclear. Asking for the correct answer provides no specific information about what the student does not understand
Specific	Requests for help that provide information about the area of need	<i>Do you have ideas for a synonym for lizard?</i>	It is clear that the student needs help identifying a synonym for lizard.
		<i>What are these called the ones at the top? They're like commas, but these things at the top. What are they called? I forgot</i>	It is clear that the student needs help identifying the term for an apostrophe.

Table 3
Codes for peer responses to help requests

Peer response	Definition	Example
Refuse to help	Peer responses that refused English learner attempts for help	Help Seeker: <i>He:lp me:!</i> Help Giver: <i>Noooo:</i>
No response	Peer silence or ignoring of the help-seeking request	Help Seeker: <i>Can you help me?</i> Help Giver: <i>((Silence))</i>
Non-content response	Peer responses that did not provide an answer or elaborated response. Non-content responses did not result in a useful answer.	Help Seeker: <i>°I need help with-°</i> Help Giver: <i>I thought you said you were do:ne</i>
Answer to all or part of the question	Peer answers with no elaboration	Help Seeker: <i>Hey can you give me, can you give me a sentence like an example sentence for re:ference?</i> Help Giver: <i>Dude look. They ma:de-</i> Help Seeker: <i>The:y ma:de-</i> Help Giver: <i>-No reference</i> Help Seeker: <i>They ma:de no reference to the accident</i>
Elaborated response	Peer answers that provided additional information or details beyond simply giving the answer	Help Seeker: <i>° Wait what are we supposed to make? Like a sto:ry? Or questions? °</i> Help Giver: <i>° Questions and a story. °</i> <i>°And then you're supposed to, you're supposed to revise it, and write it again all over. °</i>

Figure 1**Peer responses to emergent bilingual requests for help (n=110)**

Note: Answers and elaborated responses were considered helpful peer responses

Figure 2
Peer responses to emergent bilingual requests for help (n=110) by general and specific requests

